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ABSTRACT

Career education is stronger now than at any time in the past, but it is still faced with many challenges and problems. Among such problems, one of the most obvious is the relative slowness with which career education is being implemented at the senior high school level. Vocational educators, from every area of vocational education, must assume responsibility for making career education work in the senior high school. Career education calls for several changes in the teaching-learning process. The business and office occupations and distributive education fields can serve as models that have been built in ways that are already consistent with these kinds of changes. These fields have bridged the gap between those who regard themselves as academic educators and those who call themselves vocational educators. There are a number of ways in which today's business and office occupations and distributive education teachers could move to convert both academic teachers and vocational educators into career educators. (Author/PR)

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BUSINESS OFFICE OCCUPATIONS AND DISTRIBUTIVE EDUCATION: KEYS TO CAREER EDUCATION

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Introduction

USOE Commissioner Dr. T. H. Bell has described career education as "going and growing" throughout the United States. Ample justification for Commissioner Bell's statement exists. It is evident in the 46 state departments of education who now have career education coordinators. It can be seen in the 10 states now having career education legislation and the 19 states where such legislation is now under consideration. The fact that, when P.L. 93-380 was signed into law on August 21, 1974, career education became the law of the land, rather than a prerogative of the Administration, is germane to this point. So, too, is the increasing numbers of organizations and associations endorsing the career education concept. Perhaps most significant is the estimate of the Career Education Task Force of the Council of Chief State School Officers that, of the 17,000 school districts in the USA, about 5,000 are engaged in career education activities during the 1974-75 school year. Career education is stronger now than at any time in the past.

In spite of all these encouraging signs, career education is still faced with many challenges and problems. Among such problems, one of the most obvious is the relative slowness with which career education is being implemented at the senior high school level. True, some outstanding senior high school career education programs are now operating. However, by and

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Large, career education has been implemented much more frequently and much more effectively at the elementary and junior high school levels than in the senior high school. I know few who would argue this point.

Vocational educators have played key roles in implementing career education at the elementary and junior high school levels. Yet, in the senior high schools where most vocational educators are employed, we have not seen a corresponding dedication of effort. This, I suspect, is much more due to a perceived lack of authority and responsibility than to any lack of interest or concern on the part of vocational educators. It is hard to become part of the solution when, for years, vocational education has been perceived to be part of the problem. It is even harder to assume a leadership role with colleagues in other parts of education who, for years, have regarded vocational educators as "less respectable" members of the profession. The difficulty of a task bears no necessary relationship to its importance nor to its appropriateness at any particular point in time. It is, in my opinion, time that vocational educators, from every area of vocational education, assume responsibility for making career education work in the senior high school.

As I think about the challenges, there is no area of vocational education that, in my opinion, does not have a key and crucial role to play in this effort. While I would pose a different set of challenges for each AVA Division, I consider that each can and should become deeply involved in making career education operational in the senior high school. Here, my remarks will be limited to challenges facing vocational educators working in the areas of business and office occupations and in distributive education. I group these areas, not because I fail to recognize their

differences, but simply because I consider their potential for effecting positive change to carry many of the same kinds of action implications.

There are three goals here. First, I would like to specify the basic kinds of changes needed in the senior high school in order for career education to work. Second, I would like to comment briefly on those changes in terms of the present nature of business, office, and distributive education. Finally, I would like to present a set of action suggestions for your consideration.

Career Education: Challenges For Change In The Senior High School

Career education's success is dependent on its ability to effect change in American Education. Of the many kinds of change involved, the most basic are those found in the teaching-learning process. While, to be sure, many of these changes require the sanction and encouragement of school administrators, they are seen operationally in the ways in which learning experiences are made available to students. Among the many changes in the teaching-learning process called for by career education, the following seem particularly appropriate to this discussion:

1. A change toward emphasizing education, as preparation for work, (both paid and unpaid) as a prominent and permanent goal of all who teach and of all who learn.
2. A change toward expanding all curricular areas in ways that provide meaningful substance and opportunities for choice by both those who plan to attend college and by those who do not.
3. A change toward emphasizing performance evaluation as a major and important way of assessing student achievement.

4. A change toward providing students opportunities to acquire general career skills (including both basic vocational skills and good work habits) that can be useful in a wide range of occupations.
5. A change toward using persons from the business-labor-industry-professional-government community as resource persons in the classroom.
6. A change toward increasing work experience opportunities for students that takes place outside of the school as one means of supplementing (Note: NOT substituting for) student learning in the classroom.
7. A change toward teacher efforts aimed at enhancing career development, including career decision making, on the part of all students.

Career education will not be effectively implemented in the senior high school until and unless most of today's senior high school teachers accept and try to meet these challenges for change. When one thinks about senior high school teachers throughout the country, it is obvious that much remains to be done.

Business, Office, and Distributive Teachers: A Model For Change

As I think about these seven challenges for change, I am often struck by the fact that an excellent model for all teachers to consider already exists in many senior high schools. That model is found in the business and office occupations and in the distributive education teachers in our schools. Here, I would like to illustrate this fact through making a few observations with reference to each of these seven changes in light of current practices of

business and office occupations and of distributive education teachers.

First, in these fields, it is obvious that not all students are motivated toward a desire to acquire job specific skills when they enroll in classes. Many of these students want to acquire skills that can be useful to them in their broader life roles, not in their specific places of employment. Neither business and office occupations nor distributive education, as parts of vocational education, have insisted that all students enrolled in their classes do so for purposes of acquiring job specific skills. This, of course, is not to say that such skills are not emphasized, but only that they are not such an automatic requirement as to keep students with other reasons for learning from enrolling in some courses found in these fields.

Second, the fields of business and office occupations and distributive education are clearly pictured as appropriate for and available to students contemplating college attendance as well as to those who will seek employment immediately upon leaving the secondary school. These fields have, almost from the beginning, provided for the full range of student talents and interests found in the senior high school. They have clearly demonstrated that, where appropriate, both students contemplating college attendance and those who do not can learn from each other and learn to respect each other in the same classes. While this, of course, frequently happens in other areas of vocational education, it is taken for granted in business and office and in distributive education.

Third, performance evaluation has always been a hallmark of business and office occupations. Typing skills are measured by speed and accuracy at the typewriter. Accounting skills are measured by successful completion

of problems. Shorthand skills are assessed almost exclusively through performance evaluation. The emphasis is always on accomplishments of the student, not her or his failure to accomplish. Each student is encouraged to use himself or herself as a standard with a goal of improving on past performance. While this, too, is taken for granted in these programs, it should be easy to see how different this is from many other parts of the school.

Fourth, partly as an outgrowth of their performance emphasis, these areas of vocational education have always placed a high reliance on consciously emphasizing good work habits. Perhaps even more important, their curricular structure is obviously arranged in such a manner that general career skills, applicable across a very wide range of occupations and also useful outside one's place of paid employment, are emphasized in the basic courses offered in both business and office occupations and in distributive education. The general career skills goals of career education are nothing new to these fields.

Fifth, these fields have always made extensive use of persons from the business community as resource persons in the classroom and as members of advisory councils. While a common practice in all of vocational education, it is significant that the use of such persons in both business and office occupations and in distributive education includes an emphasis on the college-bound students as well as on those who will seek immediate employment upon leaving the secondary school.

Sixth, these fields have been leaders in establishing work experience programs (including many varieties of work-study) for students in ways that supplement and reenforce classroom learning activities. Both of these fields

have recognized and resisted any move to substitute any form of work experience, in toto, for classroom instruction. They stand as leaders of the concept that, while emphasizing and utilizing work experience, we do so in ways that benefit both students and employers through related classroom instruction. While some disagreement exists within career education regarding the relationships between work experience and classroom instruction, I stand squarely on the side of those who view work experience as a supplementary form of education and not as a supplanting device.

Seventh, both the fields of business and office occupations and distributive education have been established on sound career development principles. Unlike most other areas of vocational education, there are clearly established patterns for moving one's occupational preparation program from the secondary to the postsecondary levels in four-year colleges and universities as well as in community college settings. Moreover, at the secondary school level, both fields have emphasized broad career exploratory experiences cutting across a wide number of occupations fully as much as they have emphasized job specific skill acquisition. Here, too, they differ from some other parts of vocational education. In yet another crucial aspect of career development, they are similar to other vocational education areas in that they place a high reliance on active youth groups.

In all of these ways, the fields of business and office occupations and distributive education have, for years, successfully bridged the gap between those who regard themselves as "academic educators" and those who call themselves "vocational educators." In this sense, persons teaching in fields have already become "career educators" which, of course, is what we hope will become the goal of all educators at the senior high school level.

They have demonstrated, through their actions and the programs they operate, that the kinds of changes called for by career education can be accomplished. Further, they have demonstrated that they work. In my opinion, both business and office occupations and distributive education represent career education in action.

Making Change Happen

I am well aware of the fact that not all persons currently working in the fields of business and occupations and in distributive education are operating as I have pictured them here. If what I have said here has validity, the obvious first task is one of engaging in communication and gaining commitment among those now working in these fields. Without downplaying the importance nor the difficulty of this task, I would like to devote the remainder of this presentation to a brief discussion of efforts I hope persons from these fields can and will make to encourage all senior high school teachers to become, in part, "career educators."

I would like to see teachers from the business and office occupations and from the distributive education fields take an active role in converting the so-called "academic" teachers to career education. One opportunity for doing so is to emphasize the many ways in which such teachers are making direct contributions to the career preparation of students enrolled in business and office and in distributive education. The importance and the career implications of English, mathematics, the natural sciences, and the social sciences for such students are obvious. Business and office, as well as distributive education teachers, could make significant contributions to career education by making such implications clear to those teaching such subjects.

Students in business and office and in distributive education could also be asked to raise, with academic teachers, career implications of subject matter. By so doing, they can not only stimulate such teachers to consider career implications, but they may also serve as effective stimulators for other students to raise similar questions.

The contacts business and office occupations and distributive education teachers have with the business community can be used to make similar contacts for other academic teachers who wish to use resource persons from that community in their classrooms. In this way, such teachers can serve to effectively increase the number and variety of resource persons available to teachers who, in the past, have concerned themselves only with the "college-bound" students.

The vast amoung of experience business and office occupations teachers have accumulated in translating performance evaluation measures into grades and credits represents an area of expertise to be shared with all other educators. Both the philosophical and the practical implications of using performance measures in this way, while perhaps taken for granted by those in this field, are matters that many senior high school teachers have never considered. Since many students to whom the business and office occupations teacher applies such measures are the same ones with whom "academic" teachers have in their classes, there exists an easy and natural way of raising the subject with them.

The direct emphasis on general career skills which has, for so many years, been a part of both the business and office occupations and of the distributive education fields, can serve as an attractive and acceptable approach to providing a career emphasis for those academic teachers who are

"turned off" by a direct emphasis on job specific training. The concept of unpaid work, as part of one's total lifestyle, can be seen clearly in the goals of business and office occupations and of distributive education teachers and used to emphasize the importance of this aspect of career education to teachers who consider themselves as concerned only with "college-bound" students.

Opportunities for effecting change in other vocational education teachers are fully as great as are those for effecting change in the so-called "academic" teachers. Business and office occupations and distributive education teachers are both well accepted and higher respected members of the family of vocational educators. As such, they, perhaps more than any others, will find vocational educators willing to listen to suggestions that room be found, in vocational education classes, for some college-bound students who want to pick up a degree of vocationa skill that they could use in leisure-time work. Such practices hold great potential for helping vocational education become better accepted and, as has been well illustrated by the business and office occupations field, can improve the general quality of students who enroll for job specific training.

The conscientious way in which both business and office occupations and distributive education teachers have used their course offerings for career exploration as well as for imparting job specific skills is a second illustration of desired change among all vocational educators. To make room for some students who aren't sure they want to commit themselves to a full-blown vocational skill preparation program has paid handsome dividends for both the business and office occupations and for the distributive education fields. It could pay similar dividends to all vocational educators.

Further, the purposeful close working relationships between secondary and postsecondary programs of vocational preparation built by these two fields is certainly well worth emulating for all vocational areas. True, some vocational areas would have trouble finding direct counterparts at the four-year college and university level, but all should be able to relate secondary school programs to postsecondary occupational education programs at the community college level.

Concluding Remarks

All that I have been trying to say here today can be summarized in a very few remarks. First, I tried to indicate that, while the career education movement is indeed a "going and growing" movement, much remains to be done to make it effective at the senior high school level. Second, I outlined a number of changes that must take place in senior high school classrooms in order for effective career education to be provided. Third, I tried to illustrate that both the business and office occupations and the distributive education fields have been built in ways that are already consistent with these kinds of changes.

It is this belief that leads me to call teachers from both fields "career educators." Finally, I tried to suggest a number of ways in which today's business and office occupations and distributive education teachers could move to convert both academic teachers and vocational educators into "career educators." I ask it, not in the name of career education, but rather in the name of the entire student body that each of us should be dedicated to serving.